

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 12, line 16, with the following rewritten paragraph:

The mask stage MST supports the mask M and has an open portion 34A at its center portion, which the pattern image of the mask M passes through. A mask surface plate 31 is supported on the upper side step portion 3A of the main column 3 via a vibration isolating ~~unit 106~~ unit 6. An open portion 34B, which the pattern image of the mask M passes through, is also formed at the center portion of the mask surface plate 31. A plurality of gas bearings (air bearings) 32, which are noncontact bearings, is provided at the lower surface of the mask stage MST. The mask stage MST is contactlessly supported by the air bearings 32 with respect to an upper surface (guide surface) 31A of the mask surface plate 31, and is two-dimensionally movable by the mask stage drive mechanism, such as a linear motor, within a plane perpendicular to the optical axis AX of the projection optical system PL, i.e., within the XY plane, and is finely rotatable about the  $\theta Z$  direction. Movable mirrors 35 are provided to the mask stage MST. In addition, a laser interferometer 36 is provided at a position opposing each movable mirror 35. The laser interferometers 36 measure in real time the positions in the two-dimensional directions as well as the rotational angle in the  $\theta Z$  direction (depending on the case, including the rotational angles in the  $\theta X$  and  $\theta Y$  directions) of the mask M on the mask stage MST, and output these measurement results to the control apparatus CONT. The control apparatus CONT drives the mask stage drive mechanism based on the measurement results of the laser interferometers 36, thereby controlling the position of the mask M, which is supported by the mask stage MST.

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 15, line 12, with the following rewritten paragraph:

In addition, the exposure apparatus EX has a focus leveling detection system (not shown) that detects the position of the front surface of the substrate P that is supported by the substrate stage PST. Furthermore, the system disclosed in, for example, Japanese Published Unexamined Patent Application No. ~~8-37149~~ H8-37149 can be used to constitute the focus leveling detection system. The detection result of the focus leveling detection system is outputted to the control apparatus CONT. Based on the detection result of the focus leveling detection system, the control apparatus CONT can detect the positional information of the front surface of the substrate P in the Z axial direction, as well as the inclination information of the substrate P in the  $\theta X$  and  $\theta Y$  directions.